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From sports to everyday communication: a study on idioms and specialized language.

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Introduction

This thesis is going to provide insight on the use of baseball related terminology in everyday language, focusing on the history and characteristics of baseball lingo that have contributed to it being used in a variety of fields and contexts that in many cases have nothing to do with sports.

My interest in this particular topic stems from my observation of the usage of sports related vocabulary in political debates, especially when employed in a derogatory or provocative way. After noticing this occurrence, I realized most of the terms employed came from baseball, which prompted me to consider the extent of the phenomenon and explore the possible reasons behind it.

I will start my study by first analyzing the way that language is divided in categories based on its characteristics and original field of belonging, in order to understand how versatile each category is. This analysis is going to shed some light on which aspects of sports language are more likely to guarantee its extended use in Standard English. Furthermore, I will try to verify if the impact of sport on social life is a possible answer to the use of its vocabulary in contexts outside of it, and if so, to what extent. I am going to attempt to come up with answers to these questions by providing a series of studies on the subject carried out by linguists, together with my personal analysis of baseball related terms through the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).

In the first chapter, I am going to talk about specialized language, also known as LSP, and Jargon, before moving on to the concept of Slang and how this particular terminology paved its way into standard English. In regards to Specialized Language, the chapter will focus on the fields it is used in, as well as the different levels of specialization that are required and the part that LSP plays in defining the identities and roles of people that utilize it. Consequently, the concept of Jargon is going to be analyzed, particularly referencing the three main styles in which it has been classified by linguists, together with its formation and the

contexts in which it is employed. Lastly, the chapter will explore Slang, investigating its history and the reasons behind its use. Once again, I am going to describe the different ways it forms, as well as the crossover of Slang terminology in everyday language, testament of its evolution from an "unacceptable" form of speech to an allowed and sometimes even celebrated one.

The second chapter will start from the concept of identity, already mentioned in relation to specialized language, in order to then develop an analysis on status, role and the importance of the latter in sports communication. The focus is then going to be centered on sports expressions, with the help of data collected from the analysis and corpus based study conducted by Fazio and Menghini. Furthermore, I am going to delve into the myths and popular beliefs associated with sports, again providing the results of a study conducted on the subject by linguist Adrian Beard. In conclusion, in the second chapter I will talk about the extended use of sports language in day to day contexts, exploring the connection between sport and social life.

The third and final chapter presents Baseball Slang, looking at its history, perception through the years and main aspects and characteristics, further highlighting the influence of this type of Lingo in society and, consequently, in everyday language use. In the second part of the chapter, I will provide a list of the most popular and recognized baseball terms that have successfully crossed over in standard English. I am going to accompany this list with an analysis of the frequency of each idiom within the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). I will be reporting exclusively the number of entries in the corpus that are evidence of the use of each term in a context that is not related to baseball or sports in general. The chapter will end with some final considerations on the results gained with the corpus analysis, that are also going to constitute the closing argument of my study.

Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

The first chapter of my thesis is going to provide an analysis of specialized language, focusing first on its characteristics and uses and then moving on to its correlation with roles and identity, particularly within workplace, a concept that is crucial for understanding the importance of language in modern society and the set of informations it conveys. Afterwards, the chapter will discuss jargon and slang expressions, looking at their origins, their similarities and differences with specialized language as well as their current application.

1.1 Specialized language (LSP) and users

I am first going to explain the acronym LSP, Language for Special Purposes, with its counterpart being the LGP, Language for General Purposes (Bowker, 2002: 25). As the name suggests, it is a particular type of language that is used in specific fields of knowledge, and, for that reason, it is often referred to in the plural, since there are as many different LSPs as there are fields. A crucial component of this type of language is the specialized vocabulary, often arranged in glossaries specific to an LSP's determined area of interest.

Specialized language is used to discuss a specific topic. The users are therefore divided and recognized based on their knowledge and expertise within the field the topic belongs to. They can be experts, semi experts and non experts (Bowker, 2002: 27-28). Experts have usually been through a training, however, they do not necessarily have to be considered professionals, as the term can also apply to someone who has mastered a hobby or an activity that doesn't qualify as a job. Semi experts can be students who are still in the middle of their journey, while non experts are people that have just approached a field.

Because of the diversity of its users, an LSP is divided in levels of communication, with experts using highly specialized terminology while talking

to each other, as well as explanations and simplified terms when in contact with semi experts or people that are not yet familiar with a specific field and its specialized vocabulary.

Despite the obvious peculiarities of this type of language, there is not a defined line between general and specialized forms of speech. The distance between the two types can be even measured, as the level of specialization depends on a series of factors. The first one is the addresser, the person who delivers the information and who is an expert within a field. The second factor is the addressee, recipient of the information. The function of the communication, the formality of the discourse and the context and situation are the other elements that determine the level of specialization of the language that is being used (Bowker, 2002). A language is also considered specialized when it has to do with a specific topic and when it uses communicative factors that are different from those of standard forms of speech. The topic, depending on its level of specificity within a field, is going to require different levels of specialization when it comes to the language utilized. A particular group of specialized languages is PAL, acronym that stands for *Professional and Academic Language.*

 A very important notion to take into account is that general language is crucial for the existence of the specialized one. Arntz and Picht (1995 in Marzà 2009:24) explain that, in fact, general language can exist on its own, while the same cannot be said for formalised and specialized language, that were created afterwards. Some linguists (Bergenholtz and Tarp, 1995 in Marzá 2009:30-31) believe specialized language to be a subset of common language, as LSP still uses standard grammar and elements that can also be found in everyday communication. On the other hand, general language could also be considered a subset of LSP, since general expressions can be found in specialized language, and not vice versa (Bowker, 2002 ,Gotti & Giannoni, 2006, Marzá, 2009). Despite the unclear relationship between LSP and LGP, the two forms of communication are not to be seen as usable each one in a situation where the other cannot be employed, as their previously considered shared characteristics make them interchangeable in some given contexts.

Originally, the linguistic construction of specialized texts and discourses was considered interesting from a pedagogic point of view. Over time, particularly from 1980 (Widdowdson, 1979, Hutchinson and Waters, 1987 in Gotti & Giannoni 2006:9), it started to be appreciated for the fact that its analysis could also give information about the fields and cultural context a certain LSP was used in. *English for Specific Purposes*, a frontline journal published in 1980, gives us an insight on this topic, citing extracts from philosophy, sociology and cultural studies. An important concept, referred to as the *double function of specialized discourse*, is somewhat of a recurring pattern in the studies conducted on the subject (Widdowdson, 1979 in Gotti & Giannoni 2006:9). Besides being a way to transfer information, in fact, specialized language has also come to be considered as a source of power, due to how efficiently it works to validate old and new data, as well as to establish new values and ideas.

When it comes to the actual day to day use of LSP, is very important to define the concept of workplace. According to Sarangi and Roberts (1999: 1 in Candlin 2006:21), two professors who conducted several studies on language and its use in society, "workplaces are social institutions where resources are produced and regulated, problems are solved, identities are played out and professional knowledge is constituted." Arguably, such places should mantain a unity both in the way they carry out activities and in the language used. This is not always the case, given the fact that people within a field have different levels of specialization, but the main goal is for everybody to get to the point where they can master a certain level of expertise and therefore be able to integrate more and more in a workplace. In a way, it could be considered as a dynamic process, instead of a permanent condition.

The background and intentions of the people that are part of a specific environment are also very important factors to take into consideration when reflecting over the dynamics that occur between individuals belonging to the same field or social group. It is possible, for instance, to consider the experience and knowledge of everyone as different discourses, that come together in order to create a new conversation (Candlin, 2006). This process is, in fact, never ending,

even though it does come to a point where the changes are increasingly less significant. The newfound balance represented by the "conversation", however, is strictly linked to someone's role in a given context, which is going to be my next topic.

1.2 Specialized Language, identity and roles

Language itself gives us crucial information about someone's personal traits, as well as the relationship that occurs between two or more people, a concept I mentioned above when talking about the different levels of specialization. If being part of a group can shape someone's *social* identity, it is through the language that we can often source their *personal* identity. The balance between an individual's personal and social identity within a group constitutes the role that this person has, which can be reflected in the language they choose to express themselves. As Ibarra (1999 in Garzone 2010:18), says, we can define professional identity as "the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role." The concept of role is particularly important, as we use it to refer to something we expect from someone, or a part we are used to seeing them play. Roles have a double function: they first constitute part of a social activity, and then carry on building up someone's identity.

When talking about the correlation between language, role and identity, it is interesting to analyze the difference in treatment that men and women used to experience within a profession. Males and females have different discourse patterns, something that has been detected by studies carried out in regards to both unilingual and multilingual communication. Originally, the common belief was that language could be impactful and reasonable only if conceived by men, and that women only had the chance to replicate male discourses in order to be taken seriously. This led to a long period of time in which jobs were divided into "suitable" for one gender over the other. It took a long time before it became knowledge that while men and women might express themselves through slightly different language schemes, that has nothing to do with one gender being more intelligent or more reasonable than the other. In fact, these differences do not

influence someone's capability of dealing with specialized language. While the ability to understand a text can undoubtedly be influenced by someone's intelligence, mastering the structure of a specialized language has a lot to do with studying and training hard in order to be familiar with it, rather than a person's choice of expression (Archibald, 2010). Every specialized subject has a corresponding LSP; in order to be able to properly use an LSP, one has to develop a linguistic and conceptual knowledge.

1.3 Jargon

While working with specialized languages, it is also important to be familiar with the concept of Jargon. There are many definitions of jargon. The oldest meaning is "babbling", especially referred to sounds produced by animals, such as birds, apes, cats and dogs (Nash, 1993). In the modern day and age, it tends to be considered somewhat of a secret language, as it is mostly used by people belonging to the same group. In particular, it is often associated with someone's profession, as the set of words employed are likely to be specific to a determined work field. According to their uses, jargon expressions are divided into a series of main styles: Jargons of Profession, referring to a set of terms used within a specific work environment, Jargons of Production, the language expected from salesman, manufacturers and copywriters, and Jargons of Pretension, employed in a series of different fields but originally used in the educational world. These sets of terms and expressions, despite being put into different categories, are still suitable to be used in a vast array of different contexts. Jargons of profession are, as the name suggests, widely used in work related specialized language; since I have already discussed this phenomenon and the terms themselves are too specific of each job to be talked about in a broader way, I am going to focus on Jargons of Production and Jargons of Pretension, that, unlike Jargons of Profession, follow a set of general rules that make the process of classifying them easier.

1.3.1 Jargons of Production

According to Nash (1993: 40), these types of expressions are mostly used to market a product, and they have three main functions.

1)The first one is called *encoding*, which is the most basic one and consists in naming the product. The name has to be easily recognizable and is a fundamental part of attracting a potential customer.

2) The second function is *involving* and is the process of making the product appealing to the audience; a term that is particularly used for this purpose is the acronym GMP, standing for *Good Manifacturing Process*. The step of involving is strictly linked to the third and last function.

3) Lastly, we have the task of *appraising*, which is the choice of words that are used in order to give the product a series of positive connotations that go way beyond its necessity. "Perfect for children", "Fun and games for all the family" and adjectives like "thrilling", "unbelievable" and "too good to be true" are classic examples of this process. These expressions are not necessarily considered specialized terminology, but they are still jargon in the way that they are specific to the field of advertising.

This type of communication basically intends to sell the audience not only the product, but a potential relationship that the buyer could have with it.

1.3.2 Jargons of Pretension

Jargons of pretension are the wide set of terms used to convey information without being completely direct. This language is common in sports, as I am going to talk about more in depth in the following chapter, with terms such as *"skill factor available"* used in place of *"talent"*, but it is arguably a favorite in many other contexts, one in particular being politics. When it comes to education, pretension is often adopted in a more positive way compared to other fields, as is the case for *"counter productive approach"*, an expression that is used to tell someone to study harder without being too harsh. Words like *conceptual, stance, spectrum, pattern* and *system* are among the favorites in these cases (Nash, 1993, Garzone & Archibald, 2010). Besides the mentioned uses, the versatility of these words have made this jargon widely used in literature , as it allows the writer to experiment with language and be creative without necessarily have to distort the

meaning of something, but simply choosing another way to express it. This is particularly true for English poetry and linguistic comedy, as well as philosophy.

1.3.3 Jargon Formation

Jargon expressions are often created by adding premixes or suffixes to a pre-existing word. Some examples of this tendency can be *problematize*, *disbenefit*, *deselect* and other expressions frequently heard in the marketing world, such as *market-driven*, *consumer-led* and others in which the prefix or suffix is a verb used in its passive form (Nash, 1993). This use of affixes is, of course, not restricted to jargon terminology but reflects the natural evolution of the language. Some prefixes and suffixes are taken from other words, as is the case for *alcoholic*, that functions as the base in the creation of other terms such as *shopaholic* and *workaholic*.

Besides adding affixes, there are other ways to create jargon. In the world of advertising, many expressions are created with the idea of simplifying concepts that are easy to comprehend but tedious to explain. We often hear phrases like *once-in-a-lifetime opportunity*, or the universally famous acronym Diy, standing for *do-it-yourself*. This way of speaking is easily understandable and it's usually studied to grasp the audience's attention in a very short timespan (Nash, 1993). Acronymy undoubtedly plays a big role in that, but it typically takes longer for an acronym to be recognized and immediately understood by a person than it takes for other more explicit expressions. Some examples of acronyms that have become of common use, besides *diy*, are *yuppie*, standing from *young urban professional*, *lombard*, meaning a young person with loads of money but not a lot of common sense, and, in British culture, *mockney*, a term used to refer to a middle to lower class resident of London's East End. Some jargon expressions require the use of metaphors, with a frequent borrowing of words from other specialized languages, such as the use of *epicentre*, a geology term, when talking about the starting force of a riot. Some types of jargon actively take words from other sources, one in particular being the political language, that uses many expressions originally intended for other fields (Nash, 1993, Garzone & Archibald, 2010).

As language naturally evolves, so does Jargon, and some of its terminology becomes so well known to be universally used and not really be restricted to any specific field. Some of the most commonly used jargon expressions come from sports, but I'm going to talk more in depth about it in the next chapter.

1.4 Slang

Slang, despite being still very similar to jargon in some aspects, is a set of informal expressions that are almost exclusively used in oral speech. Slang is often associated with urban subcultures, but the story behind it goes further than that. The first people that started to document it were mainly the police, who began to catalog the different expressions in order to be able to understand more about the way criminals talked to each other. Linguists and people that were purely interested in the more obscure and unexplored sides of language followed shortly after. Despite the different motives and means, these people were the first to understand the importance of these terms and to be able to track down their meaning (Sornig, 1981: 3-6). During the eighteenth century the first slang dictionaries were created, thanks to which we are now able to know the main characteristics of this type of language.

By 1850, Slang had been unofficially accepted as an "illegitimate" form of colloquial speech, also referred to with the names Lingo and Argot. M. Alfredo Niceforo, an Italian anthropologist and traveler, believed that this type of language was strongly associated with a growing need of sense of intimacy while talking, as well as some people's personal desire to distinguish themselves (Niceforo, 1912 in Partridge 1950:5). In his book, Le Genie de l'Argot, published in 1912, he provides a list of reason for the popularity of slang. The ones that are still actual and therefore useful for this study are these:

1) To not be understood by people around, to maintain a sense of secrecy within a group, not only in the case of criminals but also when it comes to individuals that, for one reason or the other, choose to express themselves only to a chosen circle of people.

2) For amusement, to play around with the language.

3) To be different and to be perceived as such.

4) To establish a level of intimacy with a person that can be deeper than it would be possible if using standard language (Partridge, 1950: 5-7).

1.4.1 Slang formation

When looking at this type of language, the first thing that catches the eye from a linguistic point of view is the quantity of foreign terms utilized in many languages' slang vocabularies. The main reason why these were adopted in the first place was to maintain the secrecy and inaccessibility of the language. Other motives could have been the desire to express something in a different way than anyone else, as well as the simple enjoyment given by playing with another language and getting to know it. A common factor we can observe while looking through the history of slang is the fact that not many people know exactly the etymological meaning of an expression (Sornig, 1981). That does not seem to be a problem, however, as slang users are familiar with the current meaning of the term . Sometimes, actually, knowing the original and obsolete denotation and meaning of an expression can be deceiving and of no use for someone whose aim is to utilize it in its current form.

Some slang terms can be actual proper nouns, as is the case for Jean, sometimes used in French as a slang to refer to a waiter. These expressions can have a positive or negative connotation, depending on the social context, but they are still considered to be among the more acceptable forms of slang.

The situation is much different when it comes to the so called *"terms of abuse." "Terms of abuse"*, as the name suggests, are words used exclusively with a negative connotation to them. They are employed to insult and degrade people, and they can mock someone's social status, ethnicity and sexual orientation, among other factors. Some of them don't always have the same meaning they had when they were first invented , such as the word bastard, not typically used to insult someone of mixed origin or born outside of a marriage. These terms are deemed as extremely negative and in some cases they are even punishable by the law, especially when considered racial slurs.

A crucial component in the use of slang is the taboo factor that surrounds it, that can be very appealing for some people, especially youngsters who are in the beginning of developing an identity. In particular, slang expressions that refer to parts of the human body are often considered inappropriate, but are nevertheless used by the majority of people, even in regular colloquial speech. In other cases, slang words and expressions are created by taking into account one or more aspect of the thing or concept they want to describe (Sornig, 1981, Patridge, 1950). This is the case, for example, of the term paper, a slang term used to describe money, as well as salad, used in some contexts to describe banknotes due to the similarity of their green color. Another group of fairly popular slang terms are those that employ colors to describe physical and mental states, such as blue for sad and black for drunk.

Metaphors, as we have seen, are a very important part of slang culture and usage. What is most surprising is that while analyzing slang terminology linguists came up with the concept of metaphorical parallelism, a similarity of lexical and semantic manipulation observed in languages with little or no contact between them (Jakobson: 118, Tietze: 1953-92, Leslau: 1964 :10 in Sornig 1981:54). This concept is particularly important in explaining the universal need for metaphorization and, therefore, the importance of slang expressions themselves.

Some slang expressions are created by adopting older and no longer used terms that had the same meaning of a current word that a slang user is trying to avoid . Sometimes these words are used without fully knowing the original meaning, as the sources can be obscure and hard to decipher. In a good number of cases, when compared with their original meaning, some words and expressions are not inherently negative, but they have probably gone though a process in which the mental image associated with them has become degrading. An example can be the German word *Gemein*, that originally meant common, but when used as a slang refers to something viscious and corrupted. This change in meaning can also happen in the opposite way, with appellations once deemed insulting being gradually stripped off of their negative connotations and used in order to show appreciation or respect over someone. One example is the world robber, that

despite its originally bad undertone is now used in naming sports clubs. Slangs can, in fact, be rehabilitated and accepted as regular forms of speech, but that can only happen in some cases and over long periods of time. This has a lot to do with the evolution of language itself, since the way we speak is a reflection of our ever changing attitudes, opinions and realities (Sornig, 1981, Patridge, 1950). These aspects are very important to understand not only the way language works, but also how people choose the vocabulary they intend to use, whatever that might be.

As I mentioned when talking about specialized language and roles, how someone expresses themselves results from a series of factors that are strictly linked to the concept of identity, meaning both the identity perceived by the person and that observed by the world around. In the following chapter, I am going to delve further into this concept, in order to better explain the correlation between the evolution of language and the features, qualities and purposes of the people that use it.

Chapter 2

2.0 Introduction

The second chapter of my thesis is going to further explore the correlation between language and the concepts of identity, status and role, emphasizing the importance of the latter in sports communication, as well as providing an analysis of the most common sports expressions. Later on, I am going to focus on the connection between sport and society, in order to indroduce the concept of language exchange between fields, which is pivotal in the understanding of how sport related expressions can become part of everyday communication.

2.1 Specialized language, identity and status

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, language is fundamental to determine many of a person's characteristics. The aspects of someone's identity that can be acquired from a discourse are usually gender, ethnicity, sex, social class and status, as well as social identity, meaning the belonging of a person to a specific group, whether it is professional, political or based on other factors (Garzone, 2010). The language used within a group, in particular, is described by Frederick Herzberg, a psychologist, as a form of social behavior. In his own words (Maci, Sala, 2012: 47), "the language used in a group is a form of social behavior, *in which discourse* is a *means* of maintaining and *extending the group's knowledge* and of initiating new members into the group; *discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group's knowledge.*"

The concept of identity, strictly linked to language, is largely debated by academics. Mead (1934 in Sarangi 2010:34), for instance, considers it as a social structure, rather than something intrinsic within a person. From his point of view, social experience is a fundamental part of building an individual's identity. Berger and Luckmann (1969 in Sarangi 2010:35), two sociologists, on a similar note, see it as something that has to be developed by a person in the process in which that same individual creates and establishes a relationship with society. Identity is,

therefore, perceived as the result of a dialogue between someone's self and other people. From this concept comes the idea of status, that might be confusingly similar to role in many of its aspects but still maintains some significant differences.

As Linton, an American anthropologist, puts it (1971: 112 in Sarangi 2010:36), status is "*the position of an individual in the prestige system of a society*", while a role is the "*dynamic aspect of a status*" which translates into a series of activities a person has to carry out in order to maintain a given status. While the roles someone has are many and they can change over time, status tends to remain the same. An example of this can be the stereotypical image of the entrepreneur who, despite maintaining a position of superiority while talking to their employees, radically changes it when debating with fellow entrepreneurs or their own family members. Their status remains the same, but the roles change, depending, as seen above, on the relationships they establish with people around them.

If a person behaves according to these roles, they have a good *role performance*, which is, based on a definition by sociologist Erving Goffman (1961 in Sarangi 2010:37), the manifestation of a person's knowledge of their role's meaning and importance. In a similar way in which identity is acquired, this knowledge comes both from personal experience and from observing other people's journeys.

Due to the natural differences in people's interests and behavior, some are going to be more likely to have a specific role than others. This phenomenon is indicated as *role embracement,* with the opposite being called *role distancing*. Goffman*,* again, provides a definition (1961: 94 Sarangi 2010:37): "to embrace a role is to disappear completely into the virtual self available in the situation, to be fully seen in terms of the image, and to confirm expressively one's acceptance of it. To embrace a role is to be embraced by it."

2.2 Role in Sports-Related discourse and communication

The concept of role is particularly important in *s*ports-related discourse (Fazio, Menghini, 2009: 163), a term used to describe the vocabulary and expressions that are specific to that field. Sports legal system has a pyramidal organization, that makes it possible for clubs, players and federations to mantain a series of relationships that can be beneficial for all parties involved. For that reason, in international sports, everyone, from athletes to coaches, is under the authority of the different Federations. Everyone's status, and therefore their role, is determined and evolves according to their position in this algorithm. This situation can also be referred to as *professional identity*, or *professionalism*, which is, in the continuously changing world of sports, directly connected with cultural and linguistic aspects (Winter, 2001:13 in Fazio, Menghini, 2009:185), something I am going to talk about in depth later in the chapter.

In order to understand sport's language, someone has to first be familiar with the way its system is organized and works, at least in its most basic form, since each sport works based on a programme that maintains some differences from that of the others. A schematic approach to this concept is provided by Lakoff (1987 in Fazio, Menghini, 2009:186), a linguist who developed a conceptual scheme called *idealized cognitive model*, also referred to with the achronym ICM.

The main and most important function of this type of depiction lies in the process of "chaining", meaning connecting a series of categories in order to fully picture and explain the dynamic that works within a sport system. In the case of the activity of arbitration, for example, it indicates three groups, each carrying a set of frequently utilized terms:

1) Subjects, meaning the people that play a role in a sports set, whether they are *athletes, players* or *coaches*.

2) Legal concepts, such as *arbitration*, *appeal* and *respondence*.

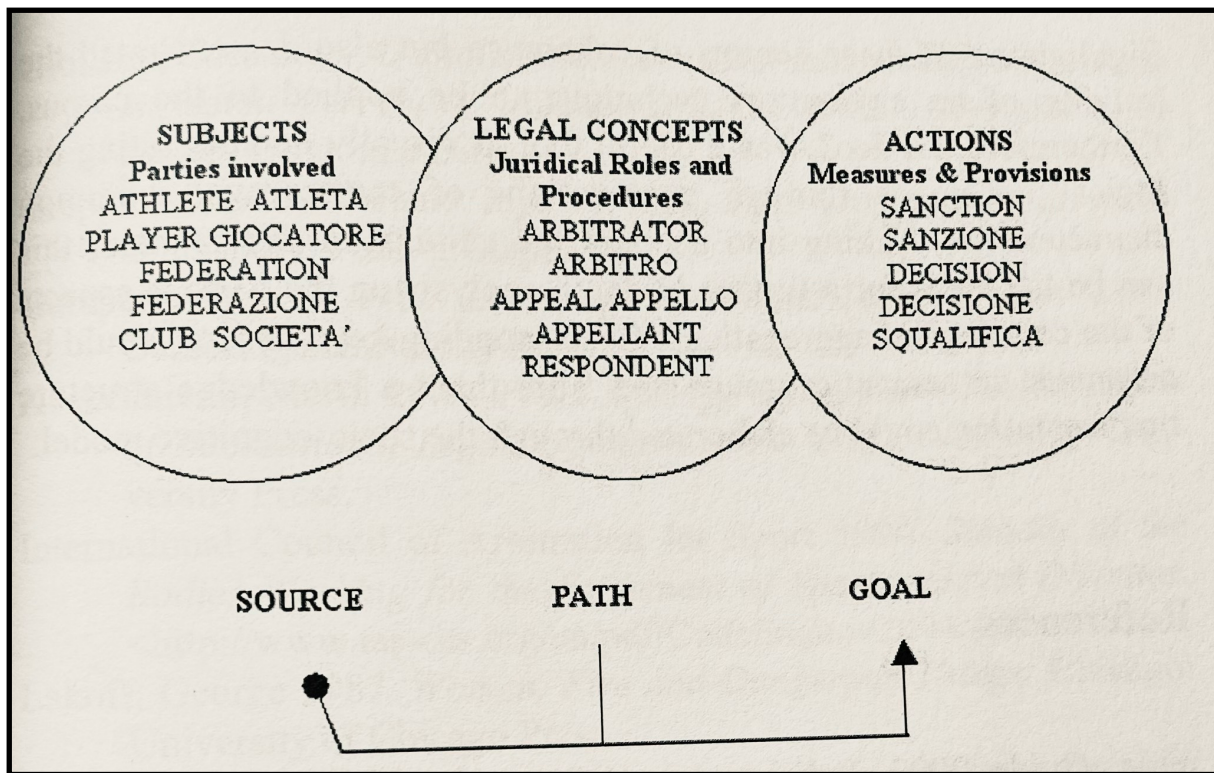3) Actions, that typically consist of either *sanctions* or *decisions*.

Figure 1. Model of categorization. (Fazio, Menghini, 2009)

2.3 Correspondence between sport expressions

Another way of classifying sport related terms is by using *corpus*, a technique used by Fazio and Menghini in their 2009 study on professional identity and sport related discourse. The term *corpus* indicates a group of texts that are regarded as being characteristic of a language and whose analysis gives information about how that given language is used and in which situations and contexts.

The research was based on a bilingual English-Italian corpus specifically representative of sports arbitration discourse; the terms for the Italian one were taken from the CONI Chamber of Conciliation and Arbitration for Sports, while the English corpus consisted of data from the Court of Arbitration for Sport. When consulting the frequency of use of sport's words like *athletes, clubs, respondents* or *disqualification*, it appears that both the original and the associated term often have a similar ranking when it comes to their position in the keyword list (Fazio, Menghini: 2009), seemingly indicating a cultural resemblance. In a smaller number of cases, on the other hand, they do not. This is true for the word *Arbitrator*, that ranks no. 175, much lower down in the list than its Italian counterpart, *Arbitro,* at no. 11. This depends on the fact that some expressions are

associated with a series of meanings in a language that do not necessarily correspond in the other, resulting in the term being more popular in one of the two.

Other words maintain a high position in the corpus, meaning that they are frequently used in more than two different languages: an example is the word Doping, a term that does not have a translation in Italian and is therefore used in its original form even in the Italian corpus.

In a few cases, words that initially seem to be equivalent in terms of significance are in reality not. An example of this phenomenon is provided by an analysis conducted by Fazio, Isidori and Bartoll on a corpus made up of 50 Sports Science Research Articles. The terms *endurance* and *resistance,* for instance*,* despite appearing very similar in meaning, are not necessarily interchangeable. Resistance, in fact, can indicate both a condition of physical strength or an activity in which a subject has to reach their limits of tolerance in order to succeed. Endurance, on the other hand, is only used when referring to physical activities that improve muscular strength through a series of exercises that are particularly focused on weight . The most common example of endurance activity in sports is aerobics, that involves the movement of the larger muscles of the body for a prolonged period of time, typically while being synchronized to a rhythm. Looking through the corpus, in fact, many recurring word combinations are *endurance training*, *muscular endurance*, *aerobic endurance* and *resistance training* (Fazio, Isidori, Bartoll, 2017: 143).

Expressions that often offer some variations in terms of equivalency and ranking within a corpus are typically those related to the process of arbitration; that not only because of the different cultural identity of arbitrators themselves, but also because of the legal system that applies in some federations (Alpa, 2003: 15-39 in Fazio, Menghini 2009:178), that requires them to take part or supervise a series of activities that might not be the same that are requested in other sports organizations. Some of the most commonly used arbitration expressions in sports are *appeal, appellant, arbitration, arbitrator, discipline, disciplinary, disqualification, disqualified, doping, respondent, sanction.*

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On the whole, despite a few differences due to different linguistic and cultural circumstances, there are many correspondences within sport related keywords (Fazio, Menghini, 2009: 178), and that seems to indicate what can be referred to as a *specific professional identity*. Communication in sports is constituted by a terminology that is highly specifical and requires its users to have a professional expertness that cannot and is not limited nor heavily influenced by cultural and linguistic "barriers", even though, as mentioned above, there is some variability in how this communication is carried out.

2.4 Culture, Society and Sports Communication

The cultural context, as seen in the previous examples, is very important in the construction of sport related discourse, as it also determines the influence that society has on sport itself. The relationship between sport and society is described in the study conducted by linguist Adrian Beard in his book, *The Language of Sport* (1998). His research is particularly focused on the different values that are associated with the concept of sport, as well as how these can be used in developing and promoting business around it.

Beard started his analysis from the game of cricket, asking a group of students from a Newcastle school to think about the correlations that they perceived when thinking about this particular activity. Once he gathered the results, he was able to divide them into four groups, each of them being an actual category.

1) Social Class: the terms associated with this concept were *upper class, public schools, civilized, sportmanship* and *etiquette*.

2) Region and Location: the words that came to the minds of the students were *countryside, southern England, village green* (referring to the grassland often used as cricket ground) *Lord's, Yorkshire v Lancashire* (cricket teams).

3) Age and gender: cricket was perceived to be mostly played by males; the words were therefore *men, middle aged men* and *old ladies in hats*; it is unclear if the latter referred to the audience or the type of people that play cricket for leisure and not in a professional context.

4) Politics: *tradition, conservatism* and *John Major* (both the names of a cricket player and of a politician) were regrouped under this category.

While these terms seem to confirm the fact that sport is influenced by political and social factors, the idea that students had of cricket was not quite reflective of the actual nature of the sport, at least not for the time being (Beard, 1998). While one of the words that was brainstormed by the students in regards to Region and Location was Southern England, cricket is actually widely played in Northern England, Wales and Scotland. Women do play cricket, and the sport's grounds are typically located in big cities, not in the countryside.

The students, however, were not alone in their beliefs. In fact, this stereotypical and partial idea of cricket, as well as of many other sports, is widely used and reinforced in the world of advertising. In order to attract people to a sport event, there needs to be a group identity based on the sport itself. This identity is often built up on myths, that are further reinforced by a series of catchphrases and terms whose function is to amplify the vision people "need" to have of a specific sport. In the case of cricket, for years the standard slogan that tv presenters used when giving an update on the game was *"for those of you who have just come in from work/ the office"*, implying that was the only category watching the sport. In the 1990s, Prime Minister John Major described his idea of the perfect English life as *"cricketers shadows lengthening over a village green"*. The phrase *"it's not cricket"* has long been used and is still used to describe forms of incorrect and dishonest behavior, in and out of sports, as cricket had a reputation for the bets and cheating that used to take place in its early days.

Another myth that is often associated with some sports, in particular the ones played as a team, is their relationship with the lower classes. The Newcastle United Football Club, for example, used to be strongly associated with the working class, at least in the early days of its success. As of today, however, the seasonal tickets to attend matches are too expensive for any lower class worker, and it is also unclear how the club would help with the regional economy, despite

its owner, Sir John Hall, repeatedly claiming that the club brings enormous social improvements in the area (Beard, 1998).

Despite popular belief, team sports such as soccer, basketball, volleyball and baseball are typically linked to the middle class rather than the lower. In the USA, the middle class is the largest social class and is made up of people whose annual income is between $50,000 to $150,000. The reason why team sports are popular in this context is partly because the set of values that are associated with them mirrors what the middle class believe in. *Prole sports,* as they are sometimes referred to, embody the concepts of hard work, team cooperation and persistence. This same principles constitute the basis of the way of living typical of the middle class (Hall, 2016).

When it actually comes to the lower class, the sports that are usually associated with it are boxing and wrestling (Hall, 2016). These don't typically require being played in private clubs and are therefore much more affordable than team sports, that are only practiced by this social group in the form of *unorganized play,* meaning for leisure and not at a professional level.

Sport is often presented as a provider of social change, but the reality is that in most cases it has to adapt to that change, rather than taking part in creating it. Rugby, for instance, was historically associated with leisure and the middle class. Over time, it went through a process of professionalization that made it widely publicized and developed.

The development of a professional sport is, in most cases, strongly related to the money that television decides to invest in it, as well as the different sponsorships associated to it, particularly those of tobacco and alcoholic drinks, that are not always allowed to show their products in television through direct advertising. The communication that is used when dealing with this business operations takes the name of *commercial language* (Beard, 1998, Fazio, Menghini, 2009).

Commercial language in sports, unlike the other types of communications mentioned above, maintains similarity and coherence even when used in different contexts. The previously mentioned analysis conducted by Fazio and Menghini

(2009), shows that the terms utilized in each corpus are not only very similar, but also, in some cases, interchangeable without major differences in meaning. Some of the most frequent commercial terms in sports, according to Stephen Nagrant, a sports marketing and sponsorship expert, are:

1) *Activation*: in sports marketing, a series of procedures a company carries out in order to mantain a relationship with its audience, such as campaigns, contests and so on.

2) *Agency effect*: this term describes an agency's influence on the dealings within a sport network, for example when it comes to contracts, in which case the agency tries to come up with the best possible deal for its clients.

3) *Ambush Marketing*: the indirect advertising of a sporting event by a brand that is not, in fact, an official sponsor.

4) *Audience*: the group of fans and supporters of a sport or team.

5) *Brand ambassador*: an athlete that receives money in order to represent a brand.

6) *Brand awareness*: the level of familiarity that exists between the public and a brand's image and core values.

7) *Brand Image*: the public's perception of a brand. This concept is studied in sport's marketing in order to sort out the factors that can influence this perception.

8) *Customer profile*: the prototypical description of a determined brand's ideal customer, taking into account elements such as age, level of involvement, income and social status.

9) *Partnership*: a relationship between a sponsor and an athlete or in general someone involved in the sport's field that is built in order to be beneficial for both parties involved.

10) *Pre-Roll*: a video advertisement that plays before the actual content; in sports the typical situation is of a sponsored ad playing before a game.

11) *Rights Holder*: someone that holds the rights for a specific asset.

12) *Sponsor*: an entity, whether it is a business or an individual that supplies money or other types of support to a person or business while receiving marketing benefits in exchange.

13) *Status*: this term can refer to the strength of either a sponsorship relationship or a marketing action.

14) *Supplier*: a company that furnishes products or other services to a sports organization.

15) *Title sponsor*: an event's sponsor whose name is indicated in the event's official advertisement.

16) *Trade*: an accord in which something, generally products or services, is traded in exchange for money.

2.5 Interchangeability between standard and specialized language and sports language

Most of the terms typical of sport's commercial language, as can be seen, are used not only in sports but also in many other fields; *trade*, for example, or *sponsor*, are frequently employed in the worlds of advertising and publicity. In a lot of occasions, these words have been originally taken from these contexts and utilized in sports with roughly the same meaning, albeit with a more specific connotation in a few cases. While the examples above only account for the use of non-sports language in sports, the opposite also occurs, with sports terminology taken and revisited in order to be suitable for a series of different environments and situations.

This type of language exchange between fields happens because sport is strongly related to society and social life, as well as fields such as psychology, biology,

physiology and physics (Fazio, Isidori, Bartoll, 2017: 139). In this regard, Fazio (Maci, Sala, 2012:50) carries out an analysis of the corpus variation in the field of sports science, providing a diagram that can explain better the reality and implications of the relationship between sport and these various fields.
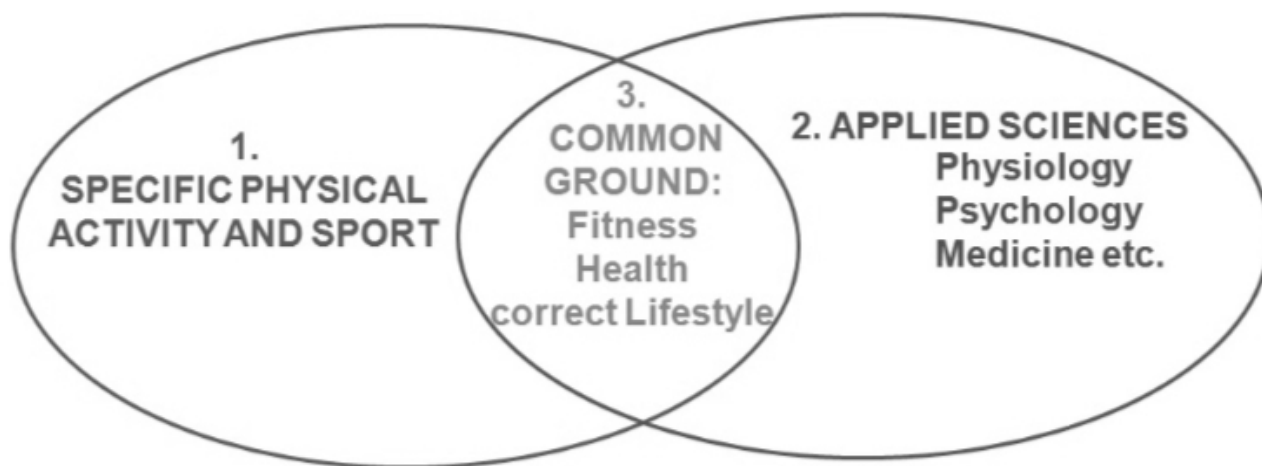

Figure 2. Sports Science conceptual complexity. (Fazio, 2012)

Figure 2 represents two conceptual groups. In the first one, the author puts *specifical physical activity and sport*. In the second one, there are *applied sciences*; in particular, physiology, psychology and medicine. When the two units intertwine, the shared values and therefore linking factors are *fitness, health* and *correct lifestyle*, that are key elements in the understanding of the correlations between sports language and specific academic discourse. The corpus utilized for this analysis consisted in texts selected from the *SportDiscus* database, particularly Sports Science Research Articles, also consulted by linguists Biber (2007 in Fazio, 2012:46) and Swales (2004 in Fazio, 2012:46) for their works on specificity. This tipe of results can give an idea of the versatility of the sports language, better explaining the reasons why it is employed in fields that have little or nothing to do with sports themselves.

In the following chapter, I will be providing more examples of the concept of language exchange, focusing especially on how it works in relation to baseball, analyzing the way that language specific to that particular sport is used in everyday contexts and situations.

Chapter 3

3.0 Introduction

In the third and final chapter of my thesis I will be talking about the language of baseball, analyzing its origins, characteristics and current uses, in particular when it comes to the adoption of this type of jargon outside of sport and in everyday communication. In order to further explore this aspect, I am going to focus on the impact of baseball on everyday language, explaining the correlation between the influence of this sport and the use of its vocabulary in standard English. My goal with this research is to see which aspects of baseball make its terminology able to be employed in fields and contexts that have little or nothing to do with the sport itself. I will complete my study on the topic by providing a list of the most common baseball expressions and their different meanings, as well as contextualizing their use inside and outside of the sport itself. In order to do that, I will accompany each term from the list with its frequency within the Corpus of Contemporary American English, also known as COCA.

3.1 Baseball slang and main characteristics

Slang, according to the popular opinion in the early nineties, was considered ephemeral (Dickson, 2011). Many expressions that had a slang origin, however, have become so popular and used in mainstream language to not really be considered slang anymore, something I mentioned in both chapter one and two and that is strongly connected with the concept of language exchange. Peter Tamony, an etymologist, described the process in 1939 giving this explanation: "A large part of our slang has a long, long history, but records of it are short. It is only since the advent of the modern sports page, about 1900, that this vital and human aspect, this color of our speech, has been properly recorded."

Sometimes, terms that are thought to have been dismissed experience an unpredicted comeback, a phenomenon seen in many forms of informal language. Considering the game of baseball, the central topic of this chapter, this aspect is

particularly true for its language, in which many expressions considered "dead" have been proven to be still in use. *Can of corn,* for example, is a baseball term indicating a flying ball that is particularly easy to catch; its origin is believed to be associated with the seemingly easy way clerks used to get cans off the shelves, by using a stick. *Can of corn* was considered an outdated expression and categorized as such both by the *Los Angeles Times* (Ostler, 1986 in Dickson 2011:17) and by the *St.Petersburg Times* (Carter, 1987 in Dickson 2011:17). In the present day and age, however, it is used with the same frequency and meaning it used to have. Tim Horgan, a journalist for the *Boston Traveler*, listed as obsolete *fastball*, and, in 1982, in the USAir inflight magazine the same thing was said about *wheelhouse*, a term that is actually still widely use by sport reporters to indicate an area within the batter's strike zone.

Other words, on the other hand, despite having been popular for entire generations, have, in fact, been replaced by others, at least for a certain amount of time. *Curveball*, for example, indicating a particular type of pitch, was not used anymore in a sports context by 1996, having been replaced by *sidearm* and *forkball*. *Screwball*, a term that described the pitch that is thrown in the opposite direction of the *curveball*, had also stopped being utilized in favour of other expressions (The Washington Post, 1996 in Dickson 2011:12). Despite that, these words are widely used nowadays, both in baseball and with their extended meanings, a testament to the fact that language is ever changing and always evolving, even when it comes to resuscitating terms that have not been heard in a while.

A particular characteristic that makes the baseball language not only stand out in its genre, but also, to some extent, confuse the people that are not too familiar with it, is the use of terms that mean more than one thing. In Baseball Lingo, another expression used to refer to this sport's slang, there are nine meanings for *crack*, *flip* and *catch*, eight for *hole*, eleven for *break*, *jump* and *cut*, thirteen for *slot* and fifteen for *hook*.

One crucial aspect of this type of informal language, which is also the one behind its use in standard English, is its ability to produce metaphors. This phenomenon

was first described as *"the incorrect use of correct words"* by a non identified sport critic (Dickson, 2011).This definition might seem confusing, but it was based on a correct perception. When describing the arm of a player in action, for example, a copious set of terms are employed, none of them being *arm; gun, hose, whip, wing, rifle* and *soupbone* are some of the ones used instead.

Another characteristic concerns the set of images that are chosen to represent the game, and this feature is connected to the concept of sport myth I talked about in the previous chapter. Baseball slang is full of references to provincial America, and the classic expression that denotes that is *game of fields and fences,* an allusion to the white fences of the suburban houses but also to those used in a baseball game (Dickson, 2011). Other less known speech forms are *catbird seat,* used to refer to the place occupied by pitchers, *farm system*, meaning a set of Minor Leagues affiliated to a Major League and *bullpen* , indicating an area where pitchers can train before the actual game starts.

A few sport commentators, while reporting the game and observing the different attitudes of people playing it, have noticed a cheerfulness and lightness that is not present in other sports. Ira Berkow, writing for *The New York Times* in 1986, pointed out this characteristic of the sport noticing the absence of words like *blitzes* or *bombs*, that are indeed present in American football, deemed a much more aggressive game than baseball.

Despite this connotation, baseball's vocabulary seems, to some extent, to be inspired by dishonest talk. Jim Land, a journalist, focused on this aspect in a letter later published in 1987 in *The Sporting News*. In his own words,

> Baseball Terminology, steeped in tradition, pays tribute to chicanery. For example, stealing bases, stealing signs, cheating toward the lines, robbing homers and hits, stabs, swipes, bluffs and suicide squeeze are all part of the game. There are hidden ball tricks, faked tags and in-the-vicinity plays.

The sport's lingo most notable characteristic when compared to that of others, is that even when referring to figures, objects or equipment used in many sports, the words are rearranged in order to be perceived as exclusive of baseball itself. If a space is used to play baseball and another sport at different times, is going to be a

ballpark when baseball is played in it, but starts to be referred to as a *stadium* in every other occasion (Dickson, 2011). In place of *head coaches*, baseball has *managers*, referees are the *umpires*, locker rooms are referred to as *clubhouses*. Verbs are different, too: when a player has to turn, he *pivots*.

3.2 Presence and recognition of baseball slang over the years

Baseball Jargon became so popular that, as some point, a whole movement was started with the sole purpose of abolishing it. It was the beginning of the 20th century, and influential publications, such as the *Colliers Weekly* and the *New York Tribune,* were very vocal supporters of this movement.

Until then, sport slang and common language had peacefully coexisted; in fact, the *Chicago Record-American*, a now defunct afternoon newspaper, had begun to publish game reports in both forms. The baseball slang, at the time, was very variegated and new terms were added frequently. Gerald L. Cohen, an author of numerous studies on slang terminology and language, produced a glossary on the subject, called *Dictionary of 1913 Baseball and Other Lingo* (2001-2003). In the book, among the other things, he wrote about having been able to gather twenty one different expressions just for the word *pitcher.*

This situation started to be first considered a problem when a teacher at the University of Chicago, Professor McClintock, complained about the use of this type of slang in newspapers, arguing that it would have been more suitable to describe the sport in dictionary English (Dickson, 2011). The issue became very quickly debated, with publications such as *The Washington Post* making fun of McClintock for his views, that were deemed old fashioned and retrograde.

The *Charleston News and Courier,* besides taking issue with the professor's ideas, argued that it would have also been rather bizarre to read about baseball in a conventional English form. As the newspaper put it, "Baseball stories told in conventional English are dull reading indeed; and it is a pertinent fact that the decadence of cricket in England is attributed by many British newspapers to the failure of the press to put brightness or ginger into the description of the game."

As it was expected, this debate was very soon abandoned and baseball kept being reported in papers both in its slang terminology and in standard English, but the whole situation can give an example of how this type of unconventional language was influential in its own way, to the point of being considered a threat to the "purity" of regular and academic English.

Not many years after this event, slang came to be seen as something of somehow refined, to the point where slang terminology started to be amassed in glossaries specific to the American dialect, one among the others being the *American Speech,* founded in 1925 and still active to this day.

Baseball Slang, besides being fully accepted at that point, started to also be appreciated and conceived as something not only admissible in a publication or report but also, in a way, necessary. *The Outlook*, a now defunct New York weekly magazine, published an article on June 13, 1923, defending the use of the language: "What makes baseball slang a joy is that it changes overnight and varies with the ingenuity of the reporter; today the Babe elevates the pill, tomorrow the Bambino clouts the sphere, and so ad infinitum." What the author of the article referred to was the vastness of baseball slang, and its capability of giving people the possibility to choose to express a concept in a number of different ways.

3.3 Influence of baseball slang on society and Standard English

The person that has had the biggest impact on baseball language and vocabulary is believed to be Henry Chadwick, an English-American sportswriter and historian, who also reportedly was one of the first journalists to give an account of the game. The first box score and rule book are attributed to him, as well as as the first prototypes of baseball manuals. Other baseball writers had an impact on the sport's lingo, especially the ones writing for Chicago newspapers in the late 19th century. John Allen Krout, a social historian, listed Leonard Washburn, Finley Peter Dunne and Charles Seymour in his book, *Annals of American Sport* (Krout, 1929), but the contribution to the language is shaped and influenced by a lot of factors, including, as I am going to talk about right now, the influence of baseball on society and standard English.

Baseball language, and therefore the sport itself, have had a great impact on American English. This was already evident in 1971, when Tristram Potter Coffin, an American folklorist, described this phenomenon in his book on ballads, *The Old Ball Game* (1971). In the book, he acknowledged the influence of baseball on standard English with this statement:

> The true test comes in the fact that old ladies who have never been to the ballpark, coquettes who don't know or care who's on first, men who think athletics begin and end with a pair of goal posts, still know and use a great deal of baseball-derived terminology. Perhaps other sports in their efforts to replace baseball as "our national pastime" have two strikes on them before they come to bat.

Elting Elmore Morison, an American historian, tried to get to the root of the sport's impact on language writing in *American Heritage,* a History Magazine (Aug-Sept. 1986). He asked the readers two simple questions: "Does it (the importance of baseball lingo) suggest that the situations that develop as the game is played are comparable to the patterns of our daily work? Does the sport imitate the fundamentals of the national life or is the national life shaped to an extent by the character of the sport?"

Despite not technically providing an answer, he quoted Reggie Jackson, a then professional right fielder, who had stated that *"The country is as American as baseball.",* seemingly suggesting the existence of an unbreakable bond between the two.

3.4 Baseball terminology and examples

Many terms coming from baseball are now freely used in other contexts, by people that might not necessarily know their original meaning and backstories. Baseball Lingo is in fact so popular that lots of its expressions can be heard in the context of other sports, such as basketball and football, whose terms, on the other hand, are not structured in a way that allows their use in other settings (Rembert, 2019).

3.4.1 Methodology

In the following list, I am going to cite the most popular idioms from the sport, as well as provide their frequency within the Corpus of Contemporary American

English (COCA) exclusively when used in a non-sport context. I chose this particular corpus as it has more than one billion words, collected from 1990; created by Mark Davies, a now retired professor of corpus linguistics, is one of the largest corpora when it comes to American English.

To make the list, I consulted articles and books that reported the most commonly utilized baseball terms; I then used the corpus to look at the contexts in which they were employed, considering the number of hits for each term and making sure to only take them into account when representative of the use of the word in a situation outside of sport. In order to do that, I looked for each idiom examining its matching strings; at the same time, I set the search on the maximum number of hits, to be able to have access to as much data as possible. Once I got to the references, I set the research parameters on MAG: Sports and NEWS: Sports, to have an exact number of the times a particular expression was used in a sports related situation and subtract that number from the total frequency of results. At that point, I looked at the remaining data and the contexts in which each term was used.

3.4.1.1 Terms and expressions derived from actions and moves

In baseball, a particular circumstance in which the ball is hit and the batter can safely run around the bases is called a *home run* or *out of the park*. Both expressions are used in regular English to indicate having accomplished something in a particular good way. *Out of the park* was used, for example, to describe Hillary Clinton speech in 2008, with this exact words: "MSNBC said Hillary knocked it out of the park" (*New American Media,* 27 August 2008). *Knock out of the park* has 14 references within the corpus. Much more popular is the expression *home run*, whose number of hits according to COCA is 2832: "If the guy wants to blame someone, blame the original owners for bringing Bain in and trying to hit a home run with the company." (http://www.redstate.com, 2012).

The expression *batting a thousand* has a similar meaning, although it suggests a series of successful achievements rather than just one. In some cases, it is used in the opposite way, in order to describe something catastrophic, as this extract from

the New York Times shows: "But Boston Scientific also needs to hope that a rare event does not become magnified. It has to be pretty much batting a thousand for a time." (Abelson, 2004). According to COCA, the term is used in 49 entries.

Linked to the action of batting is also *go to bat for someone*, a phrase that means supporting someone in a moment in which they need help (Williams, 2009), the term is used in baseball when describing the action of substituting a batter and in less specific cases when expressing support over a particular team. In total, *go to bat* can be found in 159 references in the corpus: "Harrison goes to bat for Olivia, as her friend. Because he sees her in pain." (http://alwayscoffee.wordpress.com/, 2012).

During a game, a series of fastballs thrown within the strike zone to intimidate the batter is referred to as *brush back*. In common language, it indicates the act of intimidating someone verbally. This term, as some of the ones that are more aggressive or infused with a connotation of strength, are typically used within a political setting, as shown by articles published both in *The Washington Times* and *Bloomberg News* (Limbaugh, 2003, Goldberg, 2012). Another expression that has the same meaning is *take cuts at someone*, with "taking cuts" being a synonym of waving the bat at the ball. The COCA corpus in this case unfortunately does not provide references for neither of these particular terms with the meaning of intimidating or in contexts that would be relevant for this study: "Fiona brushed back her hair, hooking it over her ear." (Nylund, 2009), "The poor condition of the economy has led the state to take cuts at every side." (http://www.highlandernews.org, 2012).

One of the most popular moves in baseball is that of the *curveball*, or *curve ball*, which is essentially a ball that is thrown with a curved motion. This particular movement can be difficult to perform correctly for the batters, and a good *curveball* is often met with great enthusiasm from both the players and the audience. In its use outside of sports, it indicates something that causes shock, turmoil and similar emotions, whether in a negative or positive way: "It really threw Stu a curveball when Olivia announced she was leaving the company.",

"Just when you think you have it all under control, life throws you a curve ball" (Farlex, Inc, 2022). *Curveball* is present in 432 entries in the corpus.

A batter who is particularly good at hitting the ball, and who hits many, is called *big hitter*. Being the ability of the batters one of the main aspects that establishes a team as stronger than the others, the expression translates in standard English as depictive of a person that is really good at business related matters. This individual is often used by a company as a spokesperson and in general to portray a positive image of the group both for potential clients and for the competition: "They left the presentation up to Alice who's their big hitter when it comes to conferences." (Beare, 2017). The frequency in the COCA corpus for *big hitter* is approximately 20.

While a good batter is expected to hit the ball most of the time, sometimes due to circumstances or the player's ability that might not happen, resulting in the ball being missed; hence the term *hit or miss,* or *swing and miss*, used to describe a situation in which there is no certainty or promise of success: "Some people feel that finding a job is hit or miss in this economy." The expression appears in 259 entries within the corpus.

Swing for the fences is similar to *hit and miss* and it is used when describing someone that attempts to get a big result even with the odds being clearly against them, or when the chances of succeeding are very little. In baseball, it typically means trying to hit a home run at the very last minute or in a situation in which it is likely to fail. *Swing for the fences* has a frequency of 117 according to the COCA corpus: "He's been pretty restrained, cautious, not someone who's going to swing for the fences and try to remake the law as a justice."(CBS, 2016).

A very rare occasion in baseball is when there are three outs within the same play, this is referred to as *triple play,* and is used in everyday communication when talking about a single action that has resulted in three separate outcomes. The frequency for *triple play* is 79: "Treatment Cream promises this triple play against aging" (https://www.goodhousekeeping.com, 2012).

Traditionally, when hitters want to show off, they throw the bat into the air, in order to purposely grasp the audience attention by doing something extravagant. In baseball, the tendency to make an exaggerated gesture to cause a reaction from the fans is called *grandstanding*, and is widely used in the world of politics to describe an over-the-top behavior from a politician. This expression can be found in 554 entries in the COCA corpus, in most cases in the context of political debates: "When it comes to grandstanding, few politicians can outdo Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham." (NYTimes.com, 2012).

A rather peculiar term is *can of corn*, that indicates a flying ball that, due to its slowness, is quite easy to hit or to catch. There are several theories about the origin of the expression, with one assuming that it comes from the habit of clerks to get a can from the shelf by using a stick. In standard English, *can of corn* translates with achieving something without particular effort. As for *brush back*, the entries in the COCA corpus for *can of corn* are not relevant for this study, as they are not representative of the term when used with the meaning I cited above: "Sweet can of corn. What are doing with that ham sandwich, boy?" (IMDB, 2009).

During a game, when the batter attempts to hit the ball but fails and gets the air instead, the expression that is often used to describe it is *swing and miss*, that in its extended meaning indicates failing at something in quite a picturesque way. *Swing and miss* has a COCA frequency of 65: "I can see some points with this article, but in some seems it swings and miss." (Walker, 2012).

If a batter is unable to hit any ball during a game, the expression that is used is *o-fer*, stylized from "oh for", the exclamation typically uttered by the batter or the audience in the occasion something like that happens. Outside of baseball, this term is especially used in business to describe someone's repeated failures at making sales. The frequency in the COCA corpus is of 2: "As we ballplayers put it after going hitless, it was an easy o-fer." (Everson, 1992).

Squeeze play is a baseball phrase that indicates a situation where the batter hits the ball very gently in order to give time to a runner on third base to score. Its

meaning outside of sport is that of a specific situation where the parties involved are trying to reach a common goal, and put a significant amount of pressure over someone in order to succeed: "With both houses of congress controlled by the opposing political party, the president is now facing a squeeze play regarding the federal budget."(Farlex, Inc, 2022). The expression traces back to 1900 and is frequently used when talking about the working world, especially describing the discomfort faced by employers in situations of intense work pressure. The frequency in the corpus is approximately 40, with many references to political debates: "It's a squeeze play to put us out of business so we can't fight and sue." (Grossman, 2005).

To play small ball is a baseball strategy that consists in runners taking bats in order to move one base at a time to eventually get to the scoring position (merriam-webster.com). Outside of the sport, the expression means proceeding with caution when doing something; it is often employed in the fields of business and politics, "He faulted the Romney campaign for playing small ball for much of July by focusing on a statement the president made about who deserves credit for a business's success."(The New York Times, 2012). The term recurs 10 times in the corpus.

If the batter has the ability to hit both with his left and right hand, is referred to as a *switch hitter*. The same term, in its extended use, can also apply for someone who is capable of performing two or more tasks at the same time (merriam-webster.com). Out of 79 hits in the corpus, *switch hitter* was used in a non baseball context just in three cases; "Manager Richard Aster is a rare switch hitter: he runs a value fund, Meridian Value, and it's a fine fund, too." (USA Today, 2005).

When describing someone that has a very responsive attitude, who is smart, concentrated and committed to something, *on the ball* is a frequently used idiom (Williams, 2009). The phrase comes from *keeping eyes on the ball,* something that is naturally required in baseball and that can measure a player's ability to stay focused during a game: "I need an assistant that's one step ahead of me and will

make sure that I've covered all my bases." *On the ball* can be found in 1270 entries in the COCA corpus.

In baseball, a batter is given a limited amount of strikes at a ball. Strike is the name that a pitch is given when the ball does not get hit by the batter, who is called out after reaching three strikes. The phrase *to have two strikes*, besides its meaning in the game, indicates being in a situation in which you really don't have many chances of succeeding at something (Williams, 2009). *Two strikes* has a frequency of 246 in the corpus: "I felt like I had two strikes against me, so it seemed crazy to me that they let me right back into public school." (Gibson, 2012).

Very similar to the expression above is *down to the last out*, that means having just one possibility left of succeeding at something. There is no correspondence for *down to the last out* in the COCA corpus.

An expression that is often work related is *hand over the baton,* whose frequency in the COCA corpus is 5. In baseball, the phrase means exactly what it seems to suggest, as a runner hands the baton to another one during a racing competition. When used in a non sports context, it means leaving a duty or a job position to someone: "I have so much work to do now that my boss has retired and handed over the baton to me" (Farlex, Inc, 2022). The word *baton* is also used in other two forms of speech:

1) *under the baton of,* with 37 entries in the corpus that are almost exclusively referencing the field of music, particularly in the context of choirs and orchestras: "It was great being under the baton of my old instructor again for our winter performance." (Farlex, 2017).

2) *Pick up the baton*, with a frequency of 35, that essentially means the same as *hand over the baton*, this time with the action being seen from the receiver's point of view: "Now, Colin's son, Clive, has picked up the baton and the company has a bright future."(HarperCollins Publishers, 2012).

The expression *play ball* is used when a game is about to start; it is habitually shouted by an umpire. Outside of the sport, its most common uses are:

1) to cooperate with someone, especially when referring to a team work or another activity in which the participants are strongly committed to reach a common goal: "We need their help, but will they play ball?"(Farlex, Inc, 2017).

2) To get started, this meaning in particular is closer to the original significance of the term: "It's time to get a move on; let's play ball."(Ammer, 2003).

Play ball is used more than 1800 times in the COCA corpus.

Play hardball, whose use outside of baseball traces back to 1973 (OED), means approaching someone or something with a resolute, hard and aggressive attitude: "Are you really gonna play hardball on this? Absolutely. It's my job to protect the President." (IMDB, 2017). The opposite of *play hardball* is *play softball*, indicating a situation in which someone does not really pose a threat to anyone else. The number of entries for *play hardball* is 425 and 279 for *play softball:* "I didn't win the case I won, or save my father's ass from the Feds, by playing softball." (Jones, 2017).

3.4.1.2 Terms coming from baseball positions and settings.

One of the most common expression coming from baseball is the word *ballpark figure,* with a frequency of 74 in the COCA corpus. *Ballpark figure* refers to an approximation of what the actual number or quantity of something might be (*theidioms.com*, 2018). The expression was originally used by commentators, when they had to guess the number of people sitting in the audience in the short time that they had at their disposal. It is composed of the word *ballpark*, that, as mentioned above, indicates the ground used to play baseball, and the word *figure:* "What something like that costs? He gives her a ballpark figure." (Kobin, 2016).

A form of speech that is particularly used in politics without having the typically negative overtones that are associated with terms used in this field is *off base*, present in the corpus with 712 entries. One of the first attestations of the word is

in a 1939 Time magazine article describing Franklin Roosevelt's tactics to deal with the crisis brought by the Second World War to the USA. The meaning of *off base*, when used outside of baseball, is that of being ill-advised, whether on purpose or not, or misinterpreting something: "And with apologies to your Hub, I don't think you are off base here." (PoliNation, 2012). A similar but slightly different utterance is *caught off base.*

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the expression *caught off base* was first used in 1935; the baseball term, however, traces back to the late 19th century, indicating the position of a runner that is, as the name suggests, momentarily outside of their base. Similarly to its original meaning, *caught off base* is used in casual conversations, meaning being caught or having been caught being not equally prepared for something: "Make sure you have all the information and know all the key talking points. You don't want to get caught off base by the interviewer."(Farlex, Inc, 2022). There are no references for this expression in the corpus.

Touch base, on the other hand, means checking up on someone, or in general making sure that things are going alright. When you are inside of a base during a baseball game, in fact, that means that you are in a stable situation for the time being, and you have time to calm down and think about your next move (Genetti, 2021). The lack of risks that the sport expression alludes to is the main aspect that plays into its use in regular language. In addition to this connotation, *Touch base* is also used with the meaning of quickly exchanging words with someone (Williams, 2009): "I have to go to an appointment, but let's touch base tomorrow." The number of entries for this particular idiom in the corpus is 282.

An expression that is very similar to the last mentioned is to *cover one's bases,* that has a frequency of 7 in the COCA corpus.This action is carried out by the defense players, whose task is to protect the bases in order to stop runners from completing their run (Beare, 2017). The extended meaning of the term in everyday language is to manage to maintain a situation under control and to have a plan B in the eventuality that things take a turn for the worse.

In baseball, the field is composed of four bases: first base, second base, third base and home base, that have to be reached by the runners. When a runner gets to the first one, it means that they have got the first step right. The same concept works for the use of the expression *first base* in everyday language: "Remember getting an interview is making it to first base. Getting hired is making it all the way home." (Beare, 2017). *First base* has 911 entries in the corpus.

An expression that is often used in business to describe a group of people who are very talented is *murderer's row*, that was originally a nickname used to refer to the New York Yankees baseball team of 1927, particularly emphasizing the threat they posed to the opposing team (translationdirectory.com). *Murderer's Row* has a frequency of 9 in the COCA corpus: "They're very influential. It's like a murderers row of important people, but you're right." (Pesca, 2008).

In baseball, the *wheelhouse* is the area of the field where a batter has the highest chances of hitting a home run. From this term comes the expression *to be in someone's wheelhouse*, which basically refers to something that a particular person is really good at. There are no matching records for this expression in the corpus.

A form of speech derived from a particular position in baseball is *step up to the plate,* that takes inspiration from the placement of the batter, right next to the home plate, a pentagonal block of rubber whose sides function as first, second and third base. In baseball, stepping up to the plate means getting ready to strike a ball. In everyday language, it indicates the act of accounting for something: "Someone will need to step up to the plate and lead this project now that Dylan has resigned." (Farlex, Inc, 2022), "The company stepped up to the plate and paid for the time and effort I spent repairing the unit." (McGraw Hill's, 2006). In some contexts it can be used with the additional meaning of doing something without postponing it. The COCA frequency for this expression is 877.

When a batter distances themselves abruptly from the plate in the process of swinging at the ball, the move that results from this action is referred to as *foot in the bucket,* meaning that the impression is that one of the batter's foot got stuck in

a bucket (baseball-almanac.com). In its use in everyday language, having *a foot in the bucket* means acting in an excessively fearful and apprehensive way. There is only one reference for this term in the corpus: "Even PJM has its foot in the bucket." (Driscoll, 2012).

While describing someone whose performance is not ideal, the baseball related expression that can be often heard is *Mendoza line*, usually accompanied by the word *below*. This term comes from Mario Mendoza, a shortstop whose career was average at best, and in baseball it means making one hit for every five times (merriam-webster.com). *Mendoza line* has 21 entries within the corpus: "A Wink and a Smile did manage to top the Mendoza Line with $2,346 in one theater." (The Numbers, 2012).

Inside baseball is a term that is used when talking about a scheme or strategy that has to be known only by a restricted circle of people within a group. The expressions used to only refer to contexts related to baseball, but is now employed in a variety of fields and situations, one among the others being politics. The frequency in the corpus is of 154: "It's some inside baseball cop stuff. Probably nothing." (Talton, 2015).

Very similar in meaning and usage to *on the ball* is *on deck*, present in 2055 entries in COCA, that translates to *ready to go* in everyday language: "Come to launch a few grenades did ya? Stay on deck. All hands needed now." (therightscoop.com, 2012). Despite having been introduced into standard communication thanks to its use in baseball, this term is thought to be originally from the navy, and is therefore a nautical word.

In an occasion in which there are two events held on the same day with roughly the same people involved, the term *double header* is employed; the meaning remains the same regardless of the context. "The city's three mayoral candidates finished Wednesday's political double header with a debate at First Congregational United Church for Christ."-Andrew Edwards, *Contra Costa Times*, 21 October 2009. *Double header* has a frequency of 38, according to COCA.

When describing the runners located on a base, the expression that is used is *ducks on the pond*, which implies that a team is well prepared and disposes of runners that are ready to score. In its extended meaning, *ducks on the pond* is used in the business field, when talking about a company that has a lot of potential (Mishra, 2023). It has 3 entries in the corpus, none of which are representative of the term with the meaning I cited above: "Ducks on the pond! How're you doin', boys?" (IMDB, 1993).

An expression that, in stark contrast with the others mentioned until now, is not necessarily believed to be originally from baseball is *front runner*. The word supposedly comes from horse racing, was later inducted into baseball, as well as other sports, and is now used especially in political contexts (Ammer, 2013), to describe someone that is strongly expected to win: "The press found some juicy secrets about the front runner and made them all public.(McGraw-Hill, 2006). Other than its use in politics, it can also be heard in regular settings to describe someone or even something that are perceived as promising: "I hear that movie is the front runner for the Best Picture Oscar" (Farlex, Inc, 2022). *Front runner* recurs 339 times in COCA.

Similar to the one mentioned above, the phrase *over the finishing line* can be traced back to baseball as well as other sports, with the premise that they have to include the act of racing in their activities. It stands for the feeling of satisfaction experienced after the end of a tedious process, whether that consists of delivering a homework, doing a team project or something else: "We've been working 80-hour weeks to get this project over the finishing line before December." (Farlex, Inc, 2022). There is only one reference for *over the finishing line* in the corpus: "If we keep quiet we can get over the finishing line and carry on where we left off." (Cruddas, 2012).

Another very common expression that is used in multiple social contexts and situations is *out of one's league,* present in COCA with 758 entries. In baseball, the term means exactly what is seems like: to not be properly qualified to be part of one team. In regular English, it indicates not being able to live up to a certain standard and therefore to not fit in within a group, or, in its most popular

connotation, to date or want to be in a relationship with someone that is perceived to be better than the other person, whether it comes to their looks, social status, culture or work position (Grammarist, 2018): "She's out of my league, right? No such thing." (IMDB, 2016).

Also related to the concept of league is *bush league*, used in baseball to describe a team or players that are not considered top tier; the first use of the expression in the sport is believed to have been in 1896, as attested by a January 13 article published by the St. Louis Globe Democrat. Players belonging to a minor league are referred to as either *busher, bushie* or *bush-leaguer*. When used in regular contexts, *bush league* refers to something that is not conducted in a professional way, usually with the premise that instead it should. The opposite of *bush league* is *big league*. *Bush league* recurs 68 times in COCA, *big league* 428: "But I hate Blizzard's execution of it. Very bush league." (Battle.net, 2012), "My feeling is that Clinton wasn't using a racial slur against Obama but instead saying that he was just a kid that doesn't belong in the big league of politics." (Wizbang, 2012).

In an official baseball game, there are nine innings, that have to be played in order for the game to be considered finished. The term *ninth inning* refers to this, indicating that something is about to end: "'We're in the late innings for U.S. small-cap stocks,'" (Burton, 2007). The frequency for *ninth inning* is of 257 entries.

3.4.1.3 Terms from popular culture.

Yogi Berra, a New York Yankee catcher, is universally known for one of his quips, "It ain't over till it's over". Originally, Berra was referring to the possibility for a team to catch up and possibly win a game, since baseball has no time limit. In an everyday context, this phrase is used when pushing someone to keep going and not give up.

Another quip attributed to Berra is "It's deja vu all over again", a phrase he reportedly pronounced in 1961 and whose frequency within the corpus is 121. Berra's quips are so universally known among baseball fans to have been renamed "Yogi-isms" (Stump, 2015).

A popular saying that comes from one of the most embarrassing moments in the history of baseball is "Say it ain't so, Joe!". These words were uttered in 1919 by a fan at Shoeless Joe Jackson, an outfielder who, together with other members of the Chicago White Sox, had agreed with gamblers to purposely lose the World Series. Both in baseball and in its extended use, the phrase expresses overwhelming disbelief over something (Boswell, Thompson, 1960).

There were no references in the corpus for these three expressions.

In daily life and in baseball, when one or more muscles in the arms or legs are under too much stress, that can result in a painful cramp that is referred to as a *charley horse*. The term was first reported as being used in the field of baseball, its actual origins, however, are disputed: while some say it comes from an horse belonging to the Chicago White Socks, other argue that is the name of a pitcher, Charley Radbourn, who was reportedly known to suffer from *charley horses*. This term has a COCA frequency of 43: "I bloodied my knee and sustained a charley horse of Homeric proportions." (McEnroe, 2011).

3.4.1.4 Terms and expressions derived from roles.

In baseball, a *closer* is a so called "relief pitcher", whose job is that of taking the starting pitcher's place when the latter is too tired to finish the game. In regular communication, a *closer* is someone who is able to carry out a task completing it. The term is especially used in the field of business. The COCA corpus unfortunately does not provide any reference for *closer* with the connotation I provided: "We're a lot closer together than when we started." (Pielke, 2012).

Similar to the expression above is *pinch hit*, indicating a substitute batter in baseball and someone that steps in and takes someone's place in a regular non-sport context. *Pinch hit* has a COCA frequency of 89: "He's even pinch hit and hosted this show. We hope he'll do it again in' 96." (CNN_King, 1995).

A *leadoff hitter* in baseball is a player that has to bat first; the term is also applied in fields in which someone has to take control and make the first move. The number of entries in the corpus for this particular expression is 63: "The American

Patriot Program announces August leadoff hitters for its national campaign." (PRLog, 2009).

3.4.1.5 Terms referencing specific situations in baseball.

To *take a rain check* is a form of speech very often heard in situations in which someone is trying to avoid doing something; the term is typically used to express the intention of postponing. The phrase has been used for as long as baseball existed (Devlin, 2021) as entire games could be canceled because of the rain. *Take a rain check* has 190 entries in COCA: "Um, but can I take a rain check? Sure, uh, I can drive you to campus." (IMDB, 2015).

Sometimes, when something happens that can entirely change a situation, the expression *whole new ball game* can be used: "Now, the public sector unions are a whole new ball game." (CalWatchDog, 2012). This refers to a particular circumstance in baseball in which two teams get unexpectedly to the same score, and therefore the chance of one of them winning over the other has to be reconsidered. *Whole new ball game* recurs 73 times in the corpus.

Out of left field is an utterance that has an interesting story to it. In daily occurrences, when someone says that something is out of left field that means that it does not make sense, or that it does not seem appropriate in that particular context. This is because, at least according to popular culture, when the Chicago Cubs played in West Side Park, there was a hospital for the mentally ill right behind the left field. The patient supposedly yelled at the players, and this is how the term is alleged to have originated (Genetti, 2021). *Out of left field* has a COCA frequency of 185: "I know it's out of left field, but how about a show for kids?" (IMDB, 2017).

3.5 Results

 One problem I encountered during this research was that the terms that had the highest number of hits were sometimes the harder to frame. That happens because it is virtually impossible to make sure that all the references are representative of the use of a specific word in a context that is detached from sports. For instance, a phrase like: "The reason the Heat can play small ball may be because they have so much of the floor covered." (wagesofwins.com, 2012), clearly employs the term *small ball* in a baseball setting. However, because of the fact that the text the segment comes from is not a sports newspaper nor a sports magazine, a basic research even conducted by genre restriction wouldn't be able to isolate this reference from the other results.

 Another issue with this study is that, because of the limited number of words that the COCA corpus allows to be searched at the same time, there were no references at all for the "Yogi-isms" and quips that I provided in the list.

Lastly, some expressions had entirely separate meanings other than the ones that derived from their use in baseball. One example is *can of corn,* a set of words that has a specific meaning in sports contexts. When the term is applied to regular speech, it can be used as a metaphor for something that is easy to do or as an actual noun, this time referring to a literal can of corn. In the COCA Corpus, this expression was mostly used with the second meaning. The same can be said for other idioms, like, for instance, *brush back,* whose only references in the corpus reported its use in hair related contexts.

Despite these drawbacks, I still believe the Corpus based research brought to light a lot of information; in order to have a clear vision of the popularity of each term in standard language I created a table with the idioms, arranged in ascending order from least frequent to most frequent.

As can be observed by looking at the COCA frequencies for each word, the most popular idioms appear to be the ones referring to baseball's moves and positions. roles. That may indicate a greater public knowledge of those aspects compared to others, such as the popular culture around the sport or some of its players most

specific roles. These results seem to be in line with the way sports typically work, with people usually manifesting more involvement in the direct occasion of a game, being therefore more exposed to the utterances and expressions that can be heard in that particular circumstance.

Frequency of baseball idioms in the COCA Corpus.

Foot in the bucket: 1	Squeeze play: 40	To go to bat for someone: 159	Off base: 712
Over the finishing line: 1	Charley horse: 43	Out of left field: 185	Out of one's league: 758
O-fer: 2	To bat a thousand: 49	To take a rain check: 190	To step up to the plate: 877
To hand over the baton: 5	Leadoff hitter: 63	To have two strikes: 246	First base: 911
To cover one's bases: 7	Swing and miss: 65	Ninth inning: 257	On the ball: 1270
Murderer's Row: 9	Bush league: 68	Hit or miss: 259	Play ball: 1850
To play small ball: 10	Whole new ball game: 73	To play softball: 279	On deck: 2055
To knock out of the park: 14	Ballpark figure: 74	Touch base: 282	Home run: 2832
Big hitter: 20	Switch hitter: 79	Front runner: 339	
Mendoza line: 21	Triple play: 79	To play hardball: 425	
To pick up the baton: 35	Pinch hit: 89	Big league: 428	
Under the baton of: 37	To swing for the fences: 117	Curveball: 432	
Double header: 38	Inside baseball: 154	Grandstanding: 554	

Figure 3. Table of Frequencies.

Conclusion

The aim of my dissertation was to analyze the use of baseball terminology in standard English language, both through the examination of studies conducted on the subject and with data gathering from an online corpus, specifically the Corpus of Contemporary American English. What made this particular topic of interest to me was the presence and use of so many sport related terms by people who in most cases were not familiar with their original meaning, which prompted me to explore what factors in the history and development of Sports Lingo might have contributed to that.

What I believed was the right way to approach this phenomenon was to look at some subsets of the English language, specifically, specialized language, Jargon and Slang. In this part of my study, I especially consulted the works by Gotti and Giannoni (2006), as well as the research conducted by Garzone and Archibald (2010), for the information they provided on different types of language and their use in society. What I noticed was that the field a language belonged to had in most cases an influence on the popularity of a specific kind of vocabulary, and was also a determining factor in its spread.

The first chapter focuses on the analysis of these language subsets, while the second introduces sports terminology and the relation between sport and society. The third chapter looks at baseball terminology and its examples, providing the frequency for each term and looking at the possible reasons that might have helped make one expression more popular than the others. The only instance in which I encountered some difficulties was while talking about slang, in the first chapter. The sources I was able to find were rather outdated, and that only allowed me to do a brief analysis of the more modern aspects of slang, having to focus instead on its origin and perception through the years.

After completing my research, the data I was able to gather suggests that the frequent usage of baseball terminology is mainly due to the popularity of the sport

itself. This appears evident especially when looking at the most used expressions: *step up to the plate*, *play ball*, *home run* and *off base* are words that, in the context of baseball, are heard in occasion of a game. The frequency of these idioms is significantly higher than that of those that are usually relegated to other aspects of the sport. These vary from popular culture, in particular Yogi Berra's quips, to technicalities like the ability of a player to "double hit", things that the general public is usually less familiar with. In a few cases, the popularization of some terms happened thanks to politics, a field in which many baseball related expressions found a new place to be used; I think this particular aspect could be further looked into by future studies on the subject. Besides that, I believe that this research could open up a bigger discussion on the role of sports related language in society, considering, among the other things, the relationship between physical activity and the different social classes, something I briefly introduced in Chapter 2 but that is still worthy of a deeper analysis.

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Summary in Italian

L'obbiettivo della mia tesi è quello di analizzare l'uso di termini tipici del baseball nel linguaggio comune o comunque in contesti estranei allo sport. Per questo motivo, ho ritenuto fosse importante partire con la mia ricerca dal modo in cui i sottoinsiemi della lingua funzionano e vengono utilizzati in modo diverso a seconda di chi li adotta e del contesto sociale e lavorativo in cui queste persone si trovano. Di conseguenza, ho focalizzato parte della tesi sull'analisi del linguaggio specializzato (LSP), dei gerghi e degli slang, in modo da essere in grado di tracciare un quadro generale del loro funzionamento prima di concentrare la mia attenzione sul linguaggio tipico dello sport.

Nel primo capitolo ho trattato l'uso del linguaggio specializzato, dei vari livelli di complessità che lo caratterizzano e di chi lo utilizza. Il linguaggio specializzato è usato, come suggerito il nome, per parlare di un argomento specifico. A seconda di quanto le persone che utilizzano questo tipo di linguaggio sono familiari con il suddetto argomento o con il contesto in cui questo è inserito, si dividono in esperti, semi esperti e non esperti. Naturalmente, questa divisione in gruppi determina un tipo di comunicazione diversa a seconda che la persona che si ha davanti sia un esperto, un non esperto o un semi esperto. Il dibattito riguardo al rapporto tra linguaggio specializzato e linguaggio di uso generale è tuttora aperto: alcuni linguisti (Arntz e Picht, Bergenholtz e Tarp) sostengono che il linguaggio specializzato non potrebbe esistere senza quello generale, considerandolo di fatto come derivato da quest'ultimo, altri ipotizzano che il fatto che espressioni di linguaggio generale si trovino in LSP potrebbe indicare l'esatto opposto.

Per quanto riguarda l'importanza del linguaggio specializzato nella società, è molto utilizzato all'interno degli ambienti lavorativi, luoghi in cui è necessaria un'unità di intenti nel portare a termine determinate attività e anche un linguaggio comune al fine di capirsi e mantenere alcune informazioni conoscibili solo per persone all'interno del gruppo.

Il linguaggio specializzato è strettamente legato ai concetti di ruolo e identità, in particolare nell'ambito della costruzione di un'identità professionale all'interno di un gruppo, e di conseguenza di un ruolo. Ho dedicato una parte del capitolo al tema del diverso modo di esprimersi di uomini e donne, discusso da James Archibald nel 2010. Nonostante esistano differenze più o meno significative nel linguaggio scelto da un genere rispetto all'altro, queste non hanno nessun tipo di influenza nella capacità o meno di padroneggiare il linguaggio specializzato.

Altro tipo di linguaggio dalle caratteristiche simili a LSP è quello gergale. Come nel caso del linguaggio specializzato, il gergo è spesso impiegato nel contesto lavorativo; in particolare, a seconda delle modalità di uso, è diviso in varie categorie: gergo di produzione, gergo di pretesa e gergo professionale. Il gergo di produzione è utilizzato specialmente nel contesto pubblicitario per creare attrattiva attorno a un prodotto. Il gergo di pretesa è invece presente soprattutto nel contesto sportivo e politico; la funzione di questo tipo di linguaggio è quella di esprimere giudizi riguardo a qualcosa o qualcuno in modo relativamente informale, senza enfatizzare eccessivamente la valenza positiva o negativa del proprio pensiero. Il gergo di professione è invece l'insieme di termini utilizzati in un campo lavorativo; cambia a seconda del contesto e di conseguenza è il più vario tra i tre tipi di gerghi.

L'ultimo argomento che ho affrontato nel primo capitolo è quello dello slang. A differenza di LSP e gergo, lo slang è usato quasi esclusivamente nel linguaggio parlato. Inizialmente lo slang era utilizzato dai gruppi criminali nel discutere tra di loro di argomenti che non dovevano essere capiti da persone esterne; da qui l'esigenza di una modalità di espressione che risultasse incomprensibile a chiunque non la conoscesse a sua volta. La funzione è rimasta sostanzialmente la stessa nei giorni nostri, per quanto molte espressioni originariamente slang siano gradualmente diventate sempre più accettate e conosciute al punto di non poter essere più realmente considerate appartenenti a questa categoria di parlato. Altre ragioni che spiegano la popolarità di questa forma di espressione sono soprattutto legate al desiderio tipico della gioventù di creare una propria identità attraverso una terminologia particolare ed esclusiva.

Nel secondo capitolo ho sviluppato ulteriormente il concetto di legame tra linguaggio specializzato, identità e status. Sono partito nello specifico dalla definizione fornita da Linton, un antropologo americano, che considera lo status come "la posizione di un individuo all'interno del sistema di prestigio di una società". Lo status deve essere mantenuto da una persona attraverso il compimento di una serie di azioni volte a rinforzare la sua posizione di fronte agli altri, e si distingue dal ruolo in quanto i ruoli tendono a cambiare nel corso del tempo, anche quando lo status rimane lo stesso. Una persona che si trova a capo di un'attività imprenditoriale, per esempio, avrà ruoli diversi a seconda che si trovi in famiglia, in azienda o stia tenendo una conversazione con altri imprenditori. I ruoli sono molteplici, ma lo status non cambia a seconda di queste situazioni. La capacità della persona di adattarsi a questi vari ruoli pur mantenendo il proprio status invariato si definisce come "good role performance".

Nello sport, i ruoli e gli status degli individui coinvolti cambiano a seconda della posizione di questi ultimi all'interno dell'algoritmo piramidale che caratterizza l'ambiente. In questo caso, si parla, come nel caso del linguaggio specializzato, di identità professionale. Analizzando lo studio realizzato sull'argomento da Fazio e Menghini nel 2009 su un corpus bilingue inglese-italiano, emerge che, nonostante alcuni termini siano più popolari in una lingua rispetto all'altra, in generale il vocabolario tipico dello sport richiede un alto livello di specializzazione per essere usato. Tale abilità e specificità non è influenzata dalle diversità linguistiche e culturali di chi adotta tale linguaggio.

Una grande influenza sulla diffusione del linguaggio sportivo è invece data dalla popolarità di un determinato sport e dall'impatto che questo ha sulla società. Come Adrian Beard ha portato alla luce nel suo libro, *The Language of Sport*, a uno sport sono spesso associati valori e immagini che non necessariamente hanno una corrispondenza nella realtà; ciononostante, tali credenze sono rinforzate da chi vi deve creare un business attorno e sceglie di fare presa sulle percezioni spesso errate delle persone per aumentare il loro entusiasmo e farle sentire parte di una comunità basata sulla condivisione di determinati valori. Un esempio tipico di questa tendenza è, per esempio, l'associazione degli sport di squadra alle classi

sociali svantaggiate, quando la realtà è che raramente una persona con un basso reddito è in grado di potersi permettere la propria permanenza all'interno di una squadra.

Nonostante questo, gli sport sono un elemento molto importante della vita sociale, e i benefici che l'attività sportiva può portare sono studiati anche a livello accademico. Per questo motivo, il linguaggio sportivo ha la capacità e versatilità di essere usato nei più vari ambiti e contesti.

Nel terzo capitolo parlo proprio di questo aspetto, focalizzandomi sulla terminologia del baseball e sul suo uso nella vita quotidiana e in campi come la politica. Lo slang tipico di questo sport è sempre stato estremamente diffuso, in gran parte grazie alla popolarità dello sport stesso. Ad un certo punto nella storia del baseball, all'inizio del ventesimo secolo, sorse un movimento al solo scopo di abolire questo parlato, in quanto era diffusa la credenza che il suo uso eccessivo potesse in qualche modo "danneggiare" il linguaggio comune. Nonostante ciò, ogni tentativo fu vano e al giorno d'oggi moltissime espressioni originariamente relegate al mondo del baseball trovano spazio in altri contesti.

Per analizzare più a fondo questo processo, ho condotto una ricerca sugli idiomi più utilizzati nel linguaggio comune, consultando numerosi articoli e pubblicazioni online e accompagnando i risultati con una verifica della frequenza di ogni termine nel Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). I termini maggiormente usati sono risultati essere quelli che facevano riferimento a particolari movimenti e posizioni nel baseball, cosa che apparentemente indica una maggiore conoscenza da parte delle persone di quegli aspetti, rispetto ad altri come la cultura popolare legata allo sport o ai comportamenti da tenere in determinate occasioni all'interno di esso. Questo risultato può essere interpretato come indicativo di un più grande coinvolgimento del pubblico in occasione di situazioni come una partita, con la conseguente maggiore esposizione e il maggiore apprendimento dei termini usati nel corso di quest'ultima.

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